



# The Consular Communiqué

## US-VISIT and BIOMETRICS: A GREAT BEGINNING

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***Are you an American citizen or resident living or traveling abroad? Are your friends or family members concerned about your well-being and safety?***

***Here are some sources of up-to-date information, so they can be aware of current events around you:***

<http://travel.state.gov>  
<http://usembassy.state.gov/colombia>  
[www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)

“This system will make it more difficult for someone to use my stolen papers to get into the U.S. and do God knows what under my name,” a visa applicant at the U.S. Consulate in Bogotá recently said. “It is inconvenient to have to come to the capital for an interview, but I think in the long run it’s better for everyone.”

This sentiment was expressed in different ways by applicants worldwide, in the 92 U.S. consulates that now require personal interviews for all people requesting a U.S. visa, including revalidations.

“People now must come in to the consulate to have their fingerprints and photos taken,” explains Bogotá’s Consul General (CG). “This is one of the new requirements of the US-Visit Program that by October 2004 will be in effect in all U.S. consulates all over the world.”

Upon entering the U.S., visitors have their fingerprints and photo taken again. That information is then compared with the data taken at the Embassy to make sure the person entering the U.S. is the same person to whom the visa was issued. When visitors leave the U.S., they scan their passports and leave their fingertips once again.

“The goal here is to improve security for Americans and millions of visitors,” the CG says. “Initially, however, there was some confusion as to what the changes meant. Some people thought that it would be more dif-

ficult to qualify for a visa. This is not the case. These are procedural changes only. I think now that people are better informed, they are beginning to see the value of the program.”

An informed public was the result of a comprehensive outreach campaign that included radio interviews, articles in the newspapers, presentations in Bogotá and other major cities, meetings with affected groups, such as travel agencies and business groups, press releases, pamphlets and brochures.

“As many consulates around the world have started the biometrics effort with successful results, the information is also getting out that this is a painless and quick process,” says Bogotá Non-Immigrant Section Chief.

The process requires each applicant to place their index fingers on a glass plate and the prints are then captured digitally. “Since there is no ink involved, there is no mess,” he says. “It only adds 30 to 60 seconds to the regular interview process.”

In Bogotá, the consulate will start taking fingerprints on May 17, 2004.

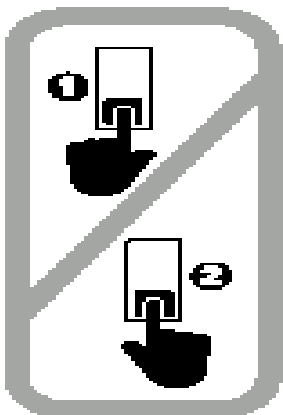
“Eventually, we’ll also take photographs of each applicant,” explains the Non-Immigrant Section Chief. “But that will happen towards the end of the year.”

And what about the fear that this would cause long lines in U.S. airports? “Hasn’t happened,” says the CG. “People understand and have been very cooperative. And, as far as we know, there haven’t been any major technical problems either. So far, so good.”

## BIOMETRICS AND THE NEW MACHINE-READABLE IMMIGRANT VISA

The machine-readable immigrant visa (MR-IV) is just around the corner for Bogotá's IV Unit. "A lot of attention has gone to the upcoming changes for Non-Immigrant Visas, or tourist visas, as they are commonly known," says the IV chief. "It is important to remember, however, that other processes will also undergo change. The IV Unit will soon start issuing the new MR-IVs. And, as with other types of visas, the date to remember is May 17, 2004."

As of May 17th, all visa applicants 14 and over, and under 80 years of age will be required to be fingerprinted in order to receive their visas. The MR-IV, which will include a digitized photo and the same scanned fingerprints as for NIVs, will also be printed on the same Lincoln visa foils, which are currently used for NIVs.



One particular difference with the initial implementation of the MR-IV is that it will require two sets of photos. One set will be the full frontal view of the face in the same format used for NIVs, and one set will be of the three-quarter view of the face in the format traditionally used for the green card.

"The Department of Homeland Security is currently working to change their green card format to alleviate this double photo requirement in the future," explains the IV chief. "Fortunately, this is a very quick step that adds only seconds to the overall process."

Another difference that will be quite noticeable is that the MR-IV will now be placed directly into the passport, so that the immigrant visa packages will have a different "look" to them. Also, due to the fingerprinting requirements and name checking procedures, it will no longer be possible to print and distribute Immigrant Visas the same day. Visa applicants will have to return later to pick up their visas.

As part of an effort to make sure these changes are implemented smoothly, the IV Unit will receive training in the technology and procedures involved in the issuance of new biometric MR-IVs.

"We are looking forward to these changes," says the IV chief. "They will improve security, protect legitimate visa holders from document fraud, and in the end, serve the public better. On May 17, we expect everything to go well."

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## NON-IMMIGRANT VISA REVALIDATION PROCESSING

As most people know by now, as of April 1, all visa applicants, including revalidations, must come to the Embassy for an interview and fingerprinting. This announcement prompted tens of thousands of people with no travel plans to send their visas to be revalidated before the changes took place, to avoid having to come to Bogotá for an interview. As a result, the revalidation process that normally took a week, is now taking up to 25 days.

The NIV Unit has made revalidation its priority and has dedicated most of its staff to the full-time adjudication of visa renewals. Nevertheless, it will still take some time before each person receives his or her passport. We ask for your patience during this transitional period, as we move to a new system designed to protect against fraud and identity theft.

Voting is a time-honored ritual for citizens in all democracies. And, according to the American Citizen Services (ACS) chief at the United States Embassy in Bogotá, Americans living abroad can easily continue to participate in the democratic process if they take into account certain factors.

“The key to successful voting overseas is to request the absentee ballots early,” says the ACS chief. “The U.S. general election on November 2 is fast approaching, and the primary elections are already underway. Starting early ensures every vote will be counted.”

The most complete source of information for overseas voters is the website of the Federal Voting Assistance Program, [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov). The site has a downloadable Federal Post Card Application, which can be used to request an absentee ballot from election officials in the locality where you intend to cast your vote. The site also has addresses for local election officials throughout the United States, a list of frequently asked questions, and links to a number of other useful sites, including the voting information sites of individual states.



American diplomats and their families cast absentee ballots at the U.S. consulate in Bombay, India. 17 October 2000. (© AFP/CORBIS)

Copies of the Federal Post Card Application and addresses for local election officials are also available in the American Citizen Services Unit of the Consular Section. Please ask for them at Window 2, between 8:30 and 12:00 a.m., Monday through Thursday.

Completed Federal Post Card Applications and voted ballots may be sent to the United States via the international mail. The American Citizen Services Unit will also accept and mail completed Federal Post Card Applications and voted ballots on behalf of U.S. citizens residing in Colombia. However, U.S. postage must be affixed, and the Embassy will not provide postage.

“When requesting an absentee ballot, be sure to use an accurate home or business address to which the ballot will be mailed,” explains the ACS chief. “Absentee ballots must be sent from the United States directly to the voter by international mail. The Embassy cannot receive or forward ballots to voters overseas.”

When Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs) remain outside the United States for over one year, they lose their resident status. If they have the intention of returning to the U.S., never abandoned that intention, and were unable to return to the U.S. due to circumstances beyond their control, the individual may apply for a **returning resident (SB-1) visa**. They must pay \$360.00 or its equivalent in Colombian pesos for the returning resident application. The visa interview fee is \$335.00 or the equivalent in Colombian pesos. If the Consular Officer determines that the person is not eligible to obtain a returning resident visa, the \$360.00 or its equivalent in pesos will not be reimbursed.



LPRs who know they will remain outside of the U.S. for more than a year, may contact the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services to apply for a **re-entry permit** which they must obtain before leaving the U.S. This permit allows LPRs to stay outside the U.S. for two years without losing status. After two years, however, LPRs will lose their status unless they return to the U.S. In other words, please be aware of how time and absence from the United States can affect your ability to retain your residency.

## WORKING TOGETHER TO STOP DOCUMENT FRAUD

### FPU and DHS develop training programs for Colombian law-enforcement and airline officials

Last February, U.S. Embassy Bogotá's Fraud Prevention Unit (FPU) conducted training sessions for over 100 Colombian immigration officials, police document inspectors, and employees of American Airlines, Avianca and other international airlines located in Medellín's Jose Marie Cordova Airport.

"We worked with the Panama branch of the Department of Homeland Security to develop a three-day training program which we could then take on the road to specific cities," explains the FPU chief.

The briefings emphasized the role of the Diplomatic Security bureau in investigating passport and visa fraud overseas, pointing out how the use of fraudulent or fraudulently obtained travel documents can facilitate terrorism. Other sessions focused on different types of legitimate and altered U.S. travel documents, and addressed U.S. concerns about alien smuggling.

"Colombia's law enforcement community is familiar with the links between migrant smuggling and narcotics trafficking," says the FPU chief. "And the airlines have a legal and financial interest in strict document control, since they are subject to fines for each improperly-documented passenger they bring to the U.S."

The U.S. Embassy Narcotics Affairs Section's Airport Interdiction Program donated ultraviolet lamps and other document-inspection equipment which

FPU distributed to airlines and immigration officials. FPU hopes to conduct similar programs at each of Colombia's five international airports with direct flights to the U.S. "We aim to facilitate legitimate travel," says the FPU chief. "And working together to stop fraud is a good measure in that effort."

### Couple arrested for producing and selling false documents after clients turn to FPU for help

Two fraudulent document vendors were arrested in March after FPU provided crucial information to the Colombian authorities. The vendors came to FPU's attention after four individuals complained to the Embassy that they had lost \$3000 dollars to a law firm promising to assist them in obtaining U.S. non-immigrant visas by providing them with false documents. The firm was run by an American citizen, who claimed to be a U.S. immigration officer, and his Colombian common-law wife, who purported to be a lawyer. Both assertions were later proven false.

The couple provided their customers with counterfeit bank statements and employment letters for use in support of visa applications. When the customers' visa applications were denied and the firm refused to refund their money, the customers took their complaints to FPU, who in turn contacted the Colombian Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (DAS). The DAS conducted an investigation, and discovered a number of fraudulent documents, including blank forms with U.S. government letterhead. The materials were confiscated, and the two were charged with document fraud.

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## How to contact the Consular Section

For all consular information on visas, supporting documents, how to schedule an appointment, stolen/lost passports, etc., visit our web page: <http://usembassy.state.gov/colombia>.

**Non-immigrant visas:** Call the Visa Information Call Center by obtaining a PIN code at any Colpatria bank. Then call the Call Center at 01-8000-12-32-32. From the U.S., dial 1-877-804-5401. There is a credit card access fee for U.S.-based numbers. From within Bogotá, dial 346-9150.

For **Immigrant Visas** information, call 571-315-1566 between 3 to 4 p.m., on Tuesdays. Priority dates for all immigrant visas are listed at [http://travel.state.gov/visa\\_bulletin.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa_bulletin.html). The e-mail address is [IVBogota@state.gov](mailto:IVBogota@state.gov).

For the **Fraud Prevention Unit**, call 571-315-2497.

For **American Citizens Services**, e-mail questions to [acs\\_bogota@state.gov](mailto:acs_bogota@state.gov).

**No visa questions will be answered at any of these numbers.**



## THE BUSINESS PROGRAM: FACILITATING BUSINESS TRAVEL

Meeting a contact in Florida, signing a contract in Chicago, or buying machinery in Atlanta are all good reasons for business people to travel, and often executives need to get there in a hurry. Welcome to the Consular Section's Special Business Program (SBP).

"The SBP allows companies that qualify to arrange early appointments for their employees quickly and directly with the Embassy," explains the SBP officer. "It also provides us with a lot more information on applicants that come through the SBP, such as their income, purpose of travel and employment with a bona fide company we have already verified."

To qualify for the program, companies must conduct significant business with the United States, have at least 50 employees on the payroll in Colombia, or, in the case of smaller companies, have a recommendation from the Consejo de Empresas Americanas, the American-Colombian Chamber of Commerce, or a recognized industry association.

"We are specially vigilant to screen out companies possibly involved in narcotics trafficking, money laundering and other criminal activity," the SBP officer says. "Our goal is to facilitate legitimate business travel and keep out impostors and companies hoping to use the program for any other reason."

### April 30: Deadline For New Applications

To apply for the Special Business Program, a company should send a letter asking to join the program. The letter should include the company's registry in the Cámara de Comercio, and a list of the complete names, dates of birth and national identification (cedula) numbers of each person who appears on the registry. The letter should also identify the number and job titles of employees who travel annually to the United States, the commercial ties the company has to the United States, and the volume of business conducted annually. A brief description of the company is also helpful.

"We look at each company carefully and there are steps that take considerable time," explains the SBP officer. "That's why we only take in applications three times a year." In 2004, completed applications will be reviewed on April 30, August 31 and December 31.

### How Biometrics Will Affect the Program

"By now I think everyone knows every person requesting a visa must ask for an appointment and come to the Embassy for an interview," says the SBP officer. "People coming in through the SBP are no longer an exception."

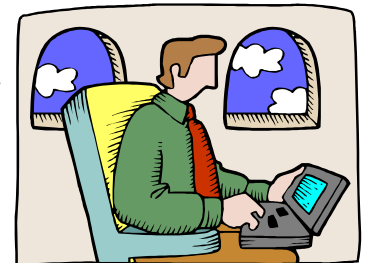
The Consular Section will begin gathering biometric data (i.e., fingerprints) from visa applicants on May 17, and may no longer issue tourist visas for top executives of member companies without an interview (as was previously done). In the future, executives seeking tourist visas will need to follow the same process as other applicants.

Once admitted to the SBP, companies that want to arrange interviews for their employees should present their requests at least 20 days in advance of the anticipated travel date. "With the taking of biometric data and other procedural changes being implemented in all U.S. Embassies, this rule will become even more important," explains the SBP officer. "Companies must plan their travel schedules carefully and allow for some days between the interview and the issuance of the visa."

### Who Can Use the Special Business Program

Only employees on the payroll of a member company (*en nomina*) are eligible to apply for a visa through the Special Business Program. Customers, commercial contacts and contractors do not qualify, although, of course, they can apply through the normal process used by other applicants. In addition, member companies are responsible for ensuring that their employees using the Program have not been denied a visa in the past.

To join the SBP send your application package to : Embajada de Estados Unidos de America, Seccion Consular, Calle 22D Bis No. 47-51, Bogota, Colombia, Atencion: Programa Especial Para Negocios.



# IN MEMORIAM

## DAVID SWAN PARRISH: A LIFE OF SERVICE AND CELEBRATION



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Last week, the American community in Colombia lost one of its most beloved members. For the last eight years, David Parrish had been the Embassy's Consular Agent in Barranquilla. As such, he became a friend and an invaluable help to U.S. citizens and Colombians alike.

Barranquilla had been David's home since he was a baby. Born in Chicago sixty years ago, he came to Barranquilla with his father and mother shortly after he was born. His father was a successful Illinois businessman and his grandfather, Karl C. Parrish, helped develop the city, establishing the famous El Prado neighborhood and founding the school that bears his name, where David attended high school.

As a young man, David returned to the United States to carry out his military service. After his time in Vietnam, he studied aviation, before returning to Colombia.

In three generations, the Parrish family had become a centrifugal force in the city. David was not only known for his family heritage and being the Embassy's consular representative, but also as a businessman on his own right and director of Parrish & Co.

As with all true Barranquilleros, David's passion was El Carnaval, the city's main cultural event. Not only did he promote and help organize it, but also participated every year, dancing his way down the main avenue next to his wife Betsy, whom he met during a previous Carnaval. By the time of his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, he had become an integral part of the city's history and development. As one of the main Barranquilla newspapers announced after his death, "...the city has lost her adopted son who always gave the best of himself to help Barranquilla and its people."

David brought the same kind of dedication to the American community. Deputy Chief of Mission Milton Drucker put it best, "Through his actions he was known to all as unfailingly professional, outgoing, generous and concerned for others, especially those in distress. Both as Consular Agent and through his other community activities, David had a direct and beneficial impact on the lives of thousands of persons."

We shall all miss his dedication, kindness and joy, and share with his wife Betsy and his nine children the sorrow of his passing.